

Called to Write

The AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers Award has been motivating law librarians for nearly 30 years

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For many law librarians, conducting research is at (or very near to) the core of their professional work.

We often guide others in their research or even do the work for them. However, for many librarians, pursuing their own professional research projects and then preparing the results for publication is a particular challenge. Perhaps other job duties consume so much time that there is little left for a writing project. Or maybe there is little encouragement from colleagues to research further a topic that sparked curiosity. Or it could be that simply identifying and finessing a research question that is both important and manageable requires a small push to overcome any inertia. Both authors have run into these obstacles, and often a little nudge was all that was needed to get a snowball of an idea rolling down the hill and gathering momentum.

Scholarship by librarians serves an important purpose to the profession and the public. Law library best practices can be shared and debated in articles. Articles on researching substantive legal issues can help lawyers and law students conduct necessary legal research. Law librarians have also traditionally written about bibliographic history, which helps future lawyers and historians. As law librarians moved into the classroom in greater numbers, we needed articles to help us decide what and how to teach. While conference presentations are a valid way to share much of this information, written articles can reach a wider audience immediately and over the long term. For example, it's far easier to find and access a journal article than a conference presentation (especially one given at a regional conference).

Above: 2012-2013 AALL President Jean M. Wenger presents Joseph Gerken with the AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers Award at the 2013 Annual Meeting in Seattle.

Among the list of Call for Papers winners, which is available at tinyurl.com/mcmusj7, are some of the most recognizable names in our profession and articles on issues that we still struggle with today. This scholarship has not only helped the authors in their careers, it has served the profession well.

History

The AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers competition was established in 1985 and was designed to provide an incentive to start and finish a research project and then share it in writing with the law librarian community. The competition has four divisions: **Open** (writers with five or more years of professional experience), **New Member** (writers with less than five years of experience), **Student** (writers pursuing degrees in law or library science), and **Short Form** (open to all writers, but entries are shorter than traditional scholarly articles). Generally one or two papers in each division are selected. Thanks to donations from LexisNexis, winners in the Open, New Member, and Students divisions are each awarded \$650, and winners in the Short Form division are awarded \$300. Winners also have an opportunity to present their papers during the Librarian as Authors session at the AALL Annual Meeting.

The Call for Papers was first proposed by Margaret Leary and Roger Jacobs (both academic law librarians) and Don Ziegenfuss (a private law librarian) because they were concerned that law librarians were not producing scholarly writing. “We decided to propose the Call for Papers Program to encourage law librarians to do the kind of research and writing that only law librarians can do,” Leary said. All librarians are skilled in finding facts, gathering literature, and unearthing obscure materials, but law librarians are special because they also deeply understand how laws are created, modified, and published. The idea was that the Call for Papers would encourage librarians at any point in their careers to complete scholarly and professional writing projects.

Impact

Fred Shapiro of Yale University, one of the first Call for Papers winners, thinks the competition fulfills its original objective, stating that it “has undoubtedly spurred many librarians

to pursue research and writing. Some of the winning papers have become classics and have advanced scholarship and law librarians’ thoughtfulness about their work and its context.”

James Duggan of Tulane University, another Call for Papers winner and current *Law Library Journal* editor, notes that the competition serves as an impetus for authors “who perhaps have an idea of what they want to write about or have a half-finished paper that they have been ‘kicking around’ and would like to finish,” and that *Law Library Journal* has benefitted from this encouragement, “having published the great majority of winning papers in the competition.”



Indeed, of the 77 papers that have won in the Open, New Member, and Student divisions, 63 (81.8 percent) were published in *Law Library Journal*. Most of the other winning papers were published in other journals or as books. Even the few papers that have not been formally published are freely available online in the Call for Papers Selected Works site (works.bepress.com/aallcallforpapers)—the site collects virtually all of the winning papers. In addition to helping grow this crop of scholarship, it is also likely that the Call for Papers motivated librarians to write and publish papers that, while valuable, did not win the competition.

Deborah Shrager of George Mason University is a 2010 winner of the Student division. Her story shows how the encouragement of a single law librarian motivated her to submit a paper she had written as an independent study project in library school. Shrager contacted law librarian James Donovan to compliment him on an article he had recently published and told him about her project. His encouragement to enter the Call for Papers, which she did not know about before then, helped ensure that the results of her independent study on academic law libraries’ use of Web 2.0 technology would be available to the entire profession.

Winning a Call for Papers award is helpful to the submitting librarian

as well. Shrager credits the award with giving her “confidence that I could make a meaningful contribution to the profession.” She adds that the award “was a good talking point as I applied for jobs.” The recognition that she received at the Annual Meeting made her feel “welcomed to the profession” and allowed her “to meet a number of veteran librarians who were very encouraging.”

Will You Answer the Call?

Law librarianship has a strong current of scholarly research and publishing. Through thoughtful examination of interesting aspects of the fields of law and librarianship, librarian-scholars are developing their research skills, demonstrating expertise, and providing intellectual stimulation for the profession. The AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers is one way AALL encourages librarians to indulge their curiosity and share the results.

Entries are generally due the first week of March each year, except entries in the Student division, which are due in mid-May. One can share drafts and gather feedback from colleagues, but to be eligible the paper must not have been previously submitted or accepted for publication as a finished product.

If you have a paper in progress, why not push to have it finished for the next Call for Papers competition? If you have an idea for a paper, write out a plan to have it ready by the next deadline. Designate a time each week or day to write, and you’ll be ready to answer the call. ■



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